

Book Reviews

issues and themes, suggested by academic historians, to a wide general audience.

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Ludmilla Jordanova, *Defining features: scientific and medical portraits 1660–2000*, London, Reaktion Books in association with the National Portrait Gallery, 2000, pp. 192, illus., £14.95 (paperback 1-86189-059-1).

Ludmilla Jordanova set herself a daunting task in writing this book. She has endeavoured to blend three distinct elements or disciplines into a single product. First, modern approaches to science and medicine which look at these disciplines not only as forms of knowledge but also as forms of work. Such approaches also look to the changing social place of doctors and scientists and to the extent to which they have sought to present themselves as, say, scholars or gentlemen or experts or even craftsmen or more than one of these simultaneously. Second Jordanova has drawn on modern scholarly approaches to portraiture. She has tried to look at the ways representations might have been read, wittingly or unwittingly, what the viewers might have understood about the sitter (and perhaps the sitter's profession) from numberless overt and covert clues in a picture. Only recently have scholars begun to bring this approach to scientific and medical portraiture, and *Defining features* does this both over time and over a range of scientific and medical areas. It also deals with a variety of media (oils, bronzes, photographs, for example) and with high art and key rings. This is ambitious enough, but Jordanova attempts (indeed is obliged) to draw on a third "discipline": her vehicle for this book is

popular writing on scholarly themes. The book is also a catalogue of an exhibition of the same name put on by Jordanova at the National Portrait Gallery, London, between April and September 2000.

Perforce she has had to write for an imagined audience of National Portrait Gallery visitors.

To say it is also a catalogue is hardly fair to the book's conventional narrative style interspersed with illustrations. Jordanova first introduces portraiture, then in a chapter on 'Boundaries' she looks at professions and work, 'Gender and scientific heroism' is self-explanatory, and 'Portraiture in practice' looks at the relation of artist and sitter. The range of material presented here is impressive. Medically, Jenner and the Hunters get a lot of space. The twentieth century is far from neglected, however. Nor does Jordanova confine her notion of portraiture to the face. A bronze cast of the right hand of Harvey Cushing and representations of the hands of Dorothy Hodgkin get analysed.

Only some of the many questions addressed by this book can be indicated here. How are scientific and medical heroes made and portrayed? What is the relation between a hero and a celebrity? How important is gentility to scientific and medical credibility? What is the relation between science and femininity in pictures? How can portraiture discredit scientific claims? Jordanova leads the reader through these and many other questions with authority and at times self-admitted tentativeness in the face of new territory. Because I was familiar with much of the material and the approaches used here I knew (I think) what Jordanova was up to. Indeed her need to spell questions out made me impatient to push on at times. Whether, on the other hand, she spells out matters in enough detail for the imagined gallery visitor only a pollster could tell (or perhaps a bookseller). None the less, this is an

Book Reviews

important study and obligatory reading for anyone looking at portraits of doctors and scientists.

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Julie V Hansen and Suzanne Porter, *The physician's art: representations of art and medicine*, Durham, NC, Duke University Medical Center Library and Duke University Museum of Art, 1999, pp. 141, illus., £37.00 (hardback 0-9672946-0-6), £19.95 (paperback 0-9672946-1-4).

The physician's art is the catalogue of an exhibition of over 100 images and other objects from the collections of four North Carolina medical schools. In a finely-judged Preface, structured around specific examples shown, Martin Kemp points out some of the historical issues involved in the study of medical imagery and artifacts, beginning with the problem of what "realism" means in the context of anatomical illustration. "No image ever exists within a purely neutral field, no matter how hard its originators may think they are trying." Kemp argues for the central interest of the "period style", or "look"; by attending to *how* things are represented (or decorated), as well as *what* is represented, we are better able to appreciate the political, professional, and philosophical currents that gave the "social fields" of production their dynamism, and grant the art its active, not merely illustrative, participation within the fields. Inevitably, some of this subtlety is then discarded in Hansen and Porter's catalogue entries, which, covering as they do a very wide historical and geographical range, cannot assume much knowledge on the reader's part: they have to explain a lot, and do so neatly if not infallibly. That (cat. 17) on Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665), for example, seems uncertain whether

acknowledging the book as a "thinly disguised offering to . . . King James" (meaning Charles) disqualifies it from a similarly active rôle in subsequent anatomical investigations, but the royal interest scarcely hurt the scientific cause in the lively social field that was Restoration England.

The exhibition was organized in five categories: 'Art and anatomy', 'The surgical arts', 'The doctor's practice', 'Obstetrics and gynecology', and 'Non-western medicine'. Such categories cannot, of course, be definitive or mutually exclusive, but the rationales for this organization (or for the ordering of exhibits within it) are not immediately clear from the catalogue: an English domestic medicine cabinet (c. 1830), for example, appears as part of the "doctor's practice", though one might think it a testimony to lay practice. A section devoted to childbirth makes sense given the ingenuity historically devoted to demonstrating its mechanisms, but by implication obscures pregnancy's prominence in representations elsewhere in the show—we begin to suspect that, like the BaKongo of the Congo (cat. 54), Europeans are ritually inclined to classify medical concerns two ways, into reproductive ones, and the rest. Such speculations are prompted by an elegantly designed and beautifully illustrated catalogue; but catalogues cannot be read as free-standing studies might.

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Michael J A Howe, *Genius explained*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. ix, 221, £35.00, \$54.00 (hardback 0-521-64018-0), £12.95, \$19.95 (paperback 0-521-64968-4).

In this ambitiously-titled book, Michael Howe takes on one of the great unanswered, perhaps unanswerable,